

Clinton heralds new era in US foreign policy

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Reporter: Emma Alberici

ELIZABETH JACKSON: Hillary Clinton has become the most senior American visitor to the European Parliament since Ronald Regan back in 1985.

The US Secretary of State held a question answer session with young people overnight in Brussels.

Ahead of a meeting later today with her Russian counterpart, she spoke of mending relationships with countries scarred by their experiences with the Bush administration.

Hillary Clinton said she was confident that the new administration would build a friendly relationship with Iran which focused on mutual interest.

Here's our Europe correspondent Emma Alberici.

EMMA ALBERICI: In a question and answer session at the European Parliament in Brussels, Hillary Clinton was clear that extending a hand to Russia would not involve turning a blind eye to those important issues about which they disagree.

She came to Europe to deliver a message that America's foreign policy under the Obama administration would be more inclusive; a distinct departure, she said, from the confrontational approach under George Bush.

HILLARY CLINTON: I think that the reaction that I've received here in Europe is wiping away a lot of the both misunderstandings and you know, nobody's editing their words or worrying about the impact that saying, oh I don't agree with that, might have.

I have invited that kind of debate. I don't think that you get the best out of friends and partners by trying to direct the debate and saying this is what we believe and you'd better believe it. That's not going to work.

EMMA ALBERICI: Later today the US Secretary of State will travel to Geneva to meet her Russian counterpart, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. Prominent on the agenda will be Iran.

The Obama administration has decided to move from the isolation of Iran and Syria to experiments in dialogue. Syria is accused of working with Iran to support and arm extremism across the region.

Washington has sent two top diplomats to Damascus this weekend to engage with President Bashar al-Assad. Hillary Clinton has also invited Iran to a conference about Afghanistan at the end of the month.

HILLARY CLINTON: We don't yet have a time or a place. We're just beginning to put that together. They were helpful early on in our efforts in Afghanistan. There were almost daily contacts, a little known fact, between our ambassador to Afghanistan and Iran's ambassador to Afghanistan. They

literally met practically every day to talk through what they could do together. Remember that the Taliban was viewed as one of Iran's adversaries. So we will invite them. Whether they come is up to them.

EMMA ALBERICI: Professor Ali Ansari of the foreign affairs think tank Chatham House thinks it's a sensible approach.

ALI ANSARI: Really in a sense, what they're saying, the argument must be let's look at an issue in which we share a lot of interest with the Iranians on a number of different levels, be it drugs, be it the security of Afghanistan, be it making sure that the Taliban don't get back into power.

Other issues, you know, Iraq, other regional issues, the nuclear issue, can then feed it to this track.

EMMA ALBERICI: There's now even talk that America will seek to reinstate its diplomatic post in Iran later this year. Whether they'll be invited to remains to be seen.

This is Emma Alberici in London for Saturday AM.